

EPH. 4:1 – 5:2

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VIII. Unity, diversity, and maturity in the body of Christ (4:1-16) – *I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you, therefore, to walk worthily of the calling to which you were called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴[There is] one body and one Spirit, just as you also were called to [the] one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

⁷But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high, he took prisoners captive; he gave gifts to men." ⁹(Now what is the [implication of] "he ascended" except that he also descended to the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is himself also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹And he himself gave the apostles and also the prophets and the evangelists and the shepherds and teachers, ¹²for the conditioning of the saints for [the] work of service, for [the] building up of the body of Christ, ¹³until we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the completed man, to [the] measure of [the] stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, being tossed by waves and blown about by every wind of teaching, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵Instead, let us, by speaking the truth in love, grow up [in] every way into him who is the head, [that is,] Christ, ¹⁶from whom the entire body, being fitted together and united by every supporting ligament, brings about the growth of the body, in accordance with the degree of activity of each individual part, for the building up of itself in love.

Note: In light of the great doctrinal themes sounded in chapters 1 – 3, Paul exhorts them in chapters 4 – 6 to live a certain way. It is not an airtight division, but there is a definite shift at 4:1 from theology to ethical admonition, from explaining what is theirs in Christ to urging them to live consistently with that mighty salvation.

A. Exhortation to maintain the unity (4:1-6)

1. Paul's exhortation is undergirded by the fact of his own costly commitment to Christ, which is reflected in his imprisonment.

2. He urges them to live worthily of the blessed state to which they have been called in Christ. Specifically, he urges them to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, which involves conducting themselves with all humility and gentleness, with patience, and bearing with one another in love.

a. Christ has effected peace between the formerly hostile Jews and Gentiles (and by implication has done so regarding all hostilities). He put to death their

hostility and formed them into one new body whose various parts share the same Spirit, the one Spirit in whom they have access to the Father (2:14-18). That unity is a spiritual fact. Paul does not exhort them to create it; he exhorts them to maintain it. Fee comments (p. 701):

The "unity of the Spirit" does not refer to some sentimental or esoteric unity that believers should work toward. Rather, Paul is speaking of something that exists prior to the exhortation. Whether they like it or not, their lavish experience of the Spirit, which they have in common with all others who belong to Christ, has made them members of the one body of Christ, both on the larger scale and its more immediate expression in the local community and in their own (believing) households. So they may as well get on with "liking it" and demonstrate as much by the way they live.

b. They are to maintain the unity of the Spirit, the unity Christ effected, in the form of the bond of peace, meaning they are to express that unity by living at peace with one another.

c. Qualities that are essential to the goal of living at peace with one another, to maintaining the unity of the Spirit, include humility, gentleness, and patience. These qualities facilitate peace and are part of what is necessary to bear with one another in love. And bearing with one another's weaknesses and failures out of love for each other is the essence of living at peace with one another.

d. Notice that gentleness, patience, love, and peace are fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). So part of maintaining the unity of the Spirit is yielding to the Spirit's transforming work in one's life that the virtues necessary for maintaining that unity may flourish.

e. To fail to maintain the unity of the Spirit, to live in a manner that mars that unity, is to say that Christ's sacrificial death, by which relationships have been reconciled, is of no real consequence to us.

3. Paul underscores the unity of Christians that he has exhorted them to maintain by listing seven unifying realities of the Christian experience.

a. There is one church, one body of Christ, so all Christians are members of the same body. There is not one church for Jews and another for Gentiles.

b. There is one Spirit, so all Christians are sharers in the same Spirit. There is not one Spirit for the Jews and another for the Gentiles.

c. There is one hope to which all Christians were called, the hope mentioned in 1:18. There is not one hope for Jews and another for Gentiles. As I said when discussing that verse, the content of the Christian hope is the riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints. It is the expectation of participating in the final purpose

of God's saving activity in Christ, participating in the universal reconciliation of all things in Christ. Christians will live forever in the new heavens and new earth in resurrection bodies that are imperishable and immortal (1 Cor. 15:50-57).

d. There is one Lord Jesus Christ, so all Christians have the same object of faith (3:12). There is not one Lord in whom the Jews believe and another in whom the Gentiles believe.

e. There is one faith, one gospel,¹ so all Christians share a fundamental body of belief. There is not one gospel for Jews and another for Gentiles.

f. There is one baptism, so all Christians share in the same initiation rite, all have submitted to immersion because of their faith in Christ. There is not one baptism for Jews and another for Gentiles. Best writes (p. 369), "The 'one baptism' is obviously the Christian initiatory rite of water baptism and not Spirit baptism, though of course the two cannot be dissociated."

g. There is one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all, so all Christians have been reconciled to, brought into a special relationship with, the same God. There is not one God to which Jewish Christians relate and another to which Gentile Christians relate. They are children in a special sense of the same God.

h. This is not a comprehensive list of all that is important in the Christian faith, as the omission of the Lord's Supper indicates. It is a list of singular items ("one" things) that Paul gives to underscore the unity of Christians. He speaks generally and does not get into the boundaries of the one hope and one faith or the essentials of the one baptism because that is not relevant to his purpose. We must seek those answers elsewhere.

B. Diversity in unity that leads to maturity (4:7-16)

1. Within the unity of the body of Christ (4:1-6), there is a diversity of function of the individual members (see 1 Cor. 12:14-20). Each member has been given by the ascended Christ a gift of grace, in varied measure, that enables him or her to perform his or her distinctive role within the body. Elsewhere we see that those gifts of grace are imparted by Christ through the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11).

2. This bestowal of grace on Christians upon Christ's ascension back to heaven is what is behind the statement with which they were familiar: "When he ascended on high, he took prisoners captive; he gave gifts to men."

a. This statement clearly is rooted in Ps. 68:18 (English versification), but it differs from that verse most significantly in the change from "he *received* gifts among men" (reflected in both the MT and LXX) to "he *gave* gifts to men."

¹ With Lincoln, 240; Best, 368-369; and O'Brien, 283, I take "faith" in an objective rather than subjective sense.

b. Perhaps Paul is putting his inspired imprimatur on a known interpretive paraphrase that brought out what was latent in a victor's receiving "gifts" among men, namely that he shared those spoils with his people. Some rabbis apparently understood the text that way, as an early targumic rendering found in the Syriac Peshitta states: "Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast given gifts to men."

c. Or perhaps he is citing a Christian hymn that interpreted Ps. 68:18 in the same way. See Muddiman, 188 and NET n. 7.

d. Hoehner, 528 suggests that Paul is not quoting Ps. 68:18 but summarizing the entire psalm in words that track v. 18. The aspect of *giving* gifts to men is taken from examples throughout the psalm.

e. Whatever the details of the reference, the picture is of the victor returning with his captives and spoils and bestowing gifts on his people. That applies to Jesus as the one who ascended in victory and distributed gifts to his people. Hoehner states (p. 530):

The point that Paul is trying to make is the fact that Christ, who ascended as victor, has the right to give gifts. For if Christ had been defeated, he would yet be in his grave and spiritual gifts would be useless to those whom he could not redeem. On the other hand, Christ did not receive gifts from the defeated foes as in Ps 68, for such would be useless to God and his children. Satan, sin, and death have been defeated by Christ's redemption. Consequently, those who were held in their bondage have been freed and have obtained the gifts of the Spirit from their victorious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

3. The parenthetical statement in vv. 9-10 elaborates on the reference of v. 8. Christ's great ascent from earth to heaven after the resurrection, which already has been mentioned (1:20-21), was preceded by his descent from heaven to earth at the time of his incarnation.²

4. The focus is on Christ's ascent in the context of his giving gifts.

a. Regarding the statement that Christ ascended "far above all the heavens," O'Brien comments (p. 296):

This language parallels his exaltation and enthronement 'in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion' (1:20-21). In the light of this similar phraseology, and the following purpose clause, 'in order that he might fill the whole universe', which corresponds to the

² With most modern commentators, I understand τῆς γῆς as a genitive of apposition.

expression in 1:23 (Christ 'fills everything in every way'), 'all the heavens' is best understood as a metaphorical reference to the powers of 1:21 who have been subjugated to him.

b. The goal of his exaltation is "that he might fill all things" in the sense of exercising universal sovereign rule. When God says in Jer. 23:24, "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" he is saying he exercises lordship over everything. Here that idea is applied to Christ.

5. It is this victorious, ascended Christ who gave to the church the apostles and also³ the prophets and the evangelists and the shepherds and teachers.⁴

a. He provided to the church these various ministers of the Word whom he gifted to serve in their respective roles. These all are men through whom the gospel is revealed, declared, and taught.

(1) The apostles and prophets were mentioned in 2:20 and 3:5. They had a foundational role as the authoritative proclaimers of the divinely revealed mystery of Christ, and their roles certainly overlapped with some of the others.

(2) "Evangelists" most likely refers to those who spread the foundational message of the apostles and prophets to new territories.

(a) That seems to be the case with Philip (called "the evangelist" in Acts 21:8) in Acts 8:26-40. Citing Eusebius, Hoehner states (p. 543), "In the early church it was thought that the evangelists were those who preached the gospel and were the successors to the apostles in that they laid the foundations of the faith in new areas, appointed shepherds, and then moved to other lands and people."

(b) Timothy is told to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5) while he was stationed in Ephesus (assuming he was in the same location as in 1 Timothy), but we are not told what that involved. Note that Paul wanted Timothy to come to him before winter (2 Tim. 4:21), so presumably the role Paul envisioned for him at Ephesus would be completed by that time.

(3) Shepherds are the leaders of local congregations. In brief, they are responsible for the spiritual welfare of the congregation (see, Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:5, 5:17; Tit. 1:9; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:2). This necessarily

³ "Also" is my attempt to give some expression to the $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu \dots \delta\grave{\epsilon}$ formula while accepting that the definite articles belong directly with the following nouns (he gave the apostles, the prophets, etc.) rather than function as substantives with the nouns serving as predicates (he gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, etc.).

⁴ The fact only one article is used for both shepherds and teachers does not mean the two groups are identical ("shepherds who teach"). See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 284. As O'Brien states (p. 300), "it is more likely that the terms describe overlapping functions (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28-29 and Gal. 6:6, where 'teachers' are a distinct group). All pastors teach (since teaching is an essential part of pastoral ministry), but not all teachers are also pastors."

involves them in teaching (Acts 20:32; 1 Tim. 3:2, 5:17; 2 Tim. 3:16; Tit. 1:9) and modeling (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 5:3) the word of God. Three specific Greek terms refer to this one leadership position: *presbutero* (translated elder), *ejpivskopo* (translated overseer or bishop), and *poimhvn* (translated shepherd or pastor). The interchangeability of these terms is clear from several passages.

(a) In Acts 20:17 Paul sends for the "elders" of the church in Ephesus. In 20:28 he reminds them that they are "overseers" and commands them "to shepherd" (verb *poimaivnw*) the church of God.

(b) In Tit. 1:5 Paul tells Titus to appoint "elders" in every city, and in 1:7 these elders are called "overseers."

(c) In 1 Pet. 5:1 Peter addresses the "elders," and in 5:2 he tells them "to shepherd" (verb *poimaivnw*) and "to oversee" (verb *ejpiskopevw*)⁵ God's flock.

(4) Teachers were those within the congregation who had some kind of formal responsibility for expounding or applying Scripture or explaining and reiterating apostolic teaching. "Timothy is urged not only to pursue a teaching ministry himself but also to entrust what he has learned to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (1 Tim. 4:13, 16; 2 Tim. 2:2)" (O'Brien, 300).

b. These ministers of the Word function within the body as catalysts for the body's growth. As they deliver the nutrition of the word of God, the other members of the body are equipped to disseminate the truth of Christ throughout the body, to widen and deepen its impact and thus to nourish the body. The ministers of the Word condition the saints for the work of service (or ministry) so that the body of Christ is built up.

c. This building up of the body of Christ is to continue until its objective is achieved, until the church collectively arrives at its ultimate goal, which is described by three parallel clauses all beginning with the same preposition (*ejj*). It is to continue until we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the completed man,⁶ to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Until the church as a whole is as fully like Christ as it will be, with all having arrived at the same complete grasp of the faith and the Son of God, the work of building up the body continues.

(1) With Barth, Turner, and O'Brien, I understand this as a reference to the church's status after the return of Christ. Turner writes (p. 1238):

⁵The command "watch over" or "oversee" is omitted from certain manuscripts, but it is probably original.

⁶"The adjective *tevlcio*" literally means 'having reached its end (*tevlo*).'" Hoehner, 554. I opt for "completed" (or "perfect") in the translation rather than "mature" because I think Paul is referring to the status of the corporate church at Christ's return.

Paul is not describing some future historical period when the church gradually reaches unity of beliefs and organization, and becomes a mature church, as the NIV could be taken as suggesting. He anticipates rather the coming of Christ which will consummate the cosmic unity inaugurated at the cross (2:11-22). By faith, and in our knowledge of the Son, we already participate in this unity (indeed it is given to us to maintain [4:21]), but we yet wait to see it fully realized. At Christ's coming, and only then, shall we, the universal corporate church, 'form the Perfect Man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself' (NJB) or, perhaps better, attain 'to the mature manhood, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ' (REB).

(2) The fact the work of building up the body will continue until its finalization at Christ's return need not mean that apostles and prophets always will be given to the church. Their role was foundational, and its effect continues through the truths revealed in the New Testament.

d. The purpose of the building up of the body of Christ that is to continue until the church's arrival at its complete, ultimate maturity is that the church may progress toward that end, may increasingly grow out of the immaturity that makes it vulnerable to theological con men who peddle false teaching that undermines the apostolic gospel. The focus is on the theological grounding of the body of Christ.

e. Instead of being mired in infancy that makes them theologically unstable, the members of the body are to speak the truth out of love for one another, out of a commitment to one another's welfare (the opposite of the deceivers who seek their harm), and through that dissemination of truth grow as a body in all respects in Christlikeness.

f. It is from Christ that the entire body brings about the growth of the body in accordance with the activity of each of the individual parts. The growth is supplied from Christ the head as the body, in union with the head, serves as a conduit for Christ's transforming power through dissemination of divine truth.

g. "Every supporting ligament" probably is a reference to the ministers of the Word. As ligaments physically connect or join together various body parts, ministers of the Word serve to connect the members of the church by being the initial purveyors of the truths they hold in common. They serve a unifying or cohering purpose in the church as providers of a common message. O'Brien remarks (p. 315): "In this summarizing picture of v. 16, both gifted ministers and gifted members have a part to play in the body's growth. The former are represented by the ligaments which provide connections between the other parts of the body, while the latter have their distinct role to play in the well-being of the whole."

IX. Live as new people in Christ (4:17-24) – ¹⁷Therefore, I say this and solemnly declare in [the] Lord: you [are] no longer to walk as the Gentiles also walk, in [the]

futility of their minds, ¹⁸being darkened in understanding, having been alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to licentiousness so as to practice every kind of impurity with greed. ²⁰But you did not learn Christ that way. ²¹For surely you heard of him and were taught in him, as [the] truth is in Jesus, ²²that, regarding [your] former way of life, you are to put off the old man who is being corrupted in accordance with the desires of deceit; ²³to be renewed in the spirit of your mind; ²⁴and to put on the new man who is created according to [the likeness of] God in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

A. No longer live as Gentiles (4:17-19)

1. Paul resumes the ethical exhortation that he began in 4:1-3, but he does so in light of his responsibility as an apostle that he has just explained in vv. 7-16. Part of the truth he is to convey to the saints is how they are to live, their ethical responsibilities as Christians.

2. He tells them that they can no longer live as Gentiles live, as those who have turned their backs on God and no longer have an awareness of or sensitivity to him. Having thrown off all restraint, they gave themselves to licentiousness (debauchery) so as to practice impurity "with greed," meaning with a continual lust for more.

B. Live new lives of righteousness and holiness (4:20-24)

1. Paul is confident they had been taught that being a Christian was incompatible with a sinful lifestyle. He feels sure they had been taught the necessity of changing the way they lived, making a fundamental break with their unethical past.

2. They had been taught to say goodbye to the sinful person they once were, a person who was in a state of moral decay as a result of desires that had been spawned by the lie in which they had wrapped themselves, the lie that they were not accountable to God.

3. When they were taught in Christ, they also were urged to be renewed in the spirit of their minds.

a. The expression "the spirit of your mind" is unusual and probably is a way of speaking about a person's interior life. As O'Brien puts it (p. 329), "[t]hey are to yield themselves to God and allow themselves to be renewed in their inner person." This is similar to Paul's exhortation in Rom. 12:2 ("Be transformed by the renewal of your mind").

b. "[T]his inward renewal is the work of the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5), progressively transforming believers into the image of Christ 'from one degree of glory to another' (2 Cor. 3:18). It is by the Spirit's power that the inner being is renewed every day (4:16)" (O'Brien, 330).

4. And they were taught to put on the new self who displays the ethical qualities belonging to God, such as righteousness and holiness.

a. Lincoln remarks (p 288), "Here, the language reflects a perspective in which there is a combination of God's gracious initiative and human responsibility, as it is made clear that the new person is created by God but must be put on by the believer."

b. These virtues of righteousness and holiness are a product of the truth, they flow from the truth of God's work and call in Christ.

X. Specific exhortations (4:25 – 5:2) – ²⁵*Therefore, having put off falsehood, let each one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.* ²⁶*Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your provoked state,* ²⁷*and do not give an opportunity to the devil.* ²⁸*Let the one who steals steal no longer, but rather let him labor, doing with [his own] hands what is good, so that he may have [something] to share with the person in need.* ²⁹*Let no spoiled word proceed from your mouth but whatever is good for building up according to the need, so that it may give grace to those who hear.* ³⁰*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for [the] day of redemption.* ³¹*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice.* ³²*Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.* **5** *Be imitators of God, therefore, as beloved children,* ²*and walk in love, just as Christ also loved us and gave himself up on our behalf, an offering and sacrifice to God resulting in a fragrant aroma.*

A. Paul now elaborates on some specific consequences of their responsibility to put off the old man and put on the new man. Each of them is to put off falsehood and speak the truth to the other members of the body. If the body is to be healthy and growing, truth must be coursing through it (4:15). Falsehood circulating in the body is like a pathogen; it works against the body's health and growth.

B. In light of the responsibility to speak the truth to one another, they are told in vv. 26-27 to deal swiftly with their righteous anger, presumably by speaking the truth to the one who provoked it, so as not to allow that anger to deteriorate into sin. Anger is such a powerful emotion that even when it is proper it is dangerous. In sinful human beings, it readily morphs into malice, resentment, and bitterness, so harboring it provides an opportunity for the devil to work evil.

1. I think the anger addressed here is righteous anger because one is able to have it and not sin. There is an anger that is not sinful. Jesus was angry in Mk. 3:5, and yet Jesus was without sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22). We often label this proper kind of anger "righteous indignation." Paul speaks of sinful anger in 4:31 (see also Col. 3:8; 1 Tim. 2:8).

2. Robertson McQuilken writes in *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1995), 299:

Righteous and unrighteous anger can be distinguished by the cause of anger. One should be angry over sin that offends God, harms others, or harms the person sinning. The difficulty with being righteously indignant is that our motives are mixed. Am I distressed over a sin that offends God and harms people, or am I angry over the way I am affected? . . . Anger is sinful when it is for the wrong reason or results in the wrong action.

. . .

To keep this emotion from igniting for the wrong reason or from burning out of control, Scripture gives two ways of control: Take it easy – don't get angry suddenly (James 1:19), and don't let it keep burning – don't let it last till the next day (Eph. 4:26). Either a "low flashpoint," a quick response without reflection, or a "slow burn," continuing on with the emotion, seem to risk causing even righteous indignation to go astray.

3. O'Brien writes (p. 339-340):

There is a proper place for righteous anger, but also 'the subtle temptation to regard my anger as righteous indignation and other people's anger as sheer bad temper' [quoting Bruce]. If ours is not free from injured pride, malice, or a spirit of revenge, it has degenerated into sin. The warning of James 1:19-20 makes the same point: 'Everyone should be . . . slow to become angry, for human anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires'.

C. Those who stole were to put that off, cease that conduct, and to put on the good work of earning material things that they might be able to share with those in need. Instead of taking from others through the minimal effort of stealing they are to work diligently so as to be in a position to give to others.

1. Hoehner notes (p. 626) that "working with one's hands" "does not necessarily imply that only manual work is valid, but Paul is using this expression as the normal portrayal of hard work for gain as opposed to gaining by stealing."

2. Earning an honest living so as to have something to share with others is part of the good works for which we have been created in Christ (2:10).

D. No spoiled or rotten word is to proceed from their mouths, which probably means a word that is harmful. It is often translated in this context as foul, unwholesome, evil, or corrupt. Instead, they are to speak words that build others up according to their needs that their doing so may be a blessing, the giving of grace, to those who hear.

E. They are commanded not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom they were sealed for the day of redemption.

1. The Spirit is grieved by rebellion in general, but here I think the focus is specifically on those sins that cause division and disrupt communal life, sins that break the unity of the Spirit (4:3). The preceding sins of lying, harboring anger, stealing, and destructive comments all qualify. They create resentment and hostility within the community.

2. The following commands also relate to this general command not to grieve the Holy Spirit.

a. Bitterness, wrath, anger, shouting, slander, and malice disrupt the communal peace and thus represent a failure to maintain the unity of the Spirit (4:3). They are to be done away with.

b. On the other hand, the unity of the Spirit is maintained by their being kind, compassionate, and forgiving to one another. Regarding forgiveness, Paul reminds them that this is no more than God has already done for them in Christ, thus casting the unforgiver clearly in the position of the unmerciful servant in Mat. 18:21-35.

F. In sum, they are, as God's beloved children, to be imitators of him specifically with regard to loving one another. The model and ground for this life of love in the Christian community is Christ's love and sacrificial offering of himself. O'Brien writes (p. 355):

The apostle's point is plain. Christ's handing himself over to death for his people was the supreme demonstration of his love for them. Because he is both the ground and model of their love, costly, sacrificial love is to be the distinguishing mark of their lives. To serve others in this way is not only to please God; it is also to imitate both God and Christ.